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SUBJECT: UN REFORM/SYG HIGH LEVEL PANEL ON DEVELOPMENT -
PURPOSE AND PARAMETERS

REF: USUN 129

¶1. (U) Summary. At an off-site event hosted by the UN Missions of Egypt and France on February 24-25, senior UN officials laid out expectations for the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Humanitarian Assistance, the Environment and Development. Projected goals include the need to better integrate UN humanitarian, development and environmental activities; overcome fragmentation at the country level and between the field and headquarters; ensure sustained and predictable financing, and to imbue all these activities with stronger strategic vision. SYG Annan's Chief of Staff Mark Malloch Brown additionally called for the creation of a new agency to more comprehensively organize environmental policy. End Summary.

Panel Purpose and Schedule

¶2. (U) At a New York retreat hosted by the UN Missions of Egypt and France on February 24-25, UN officials projected a schedule and themes for the Secretary-General's recently established High Level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Humanitarian Assistance, the Environment and Development. Executive Director of the Panel Adnan Amin emphasized the need to strengthen coordination of humanitarian and development activities, including the operations of specialized UN agencies in the field and communications between UN Resident Country Coordinators and headquarters. He said the Panel would also consider how to "mainstream" environmental concerns into decisions on development. Impediments to "predictable and sustained financing" of development would need to be analyzed and overcome. Amin criticized fragmentation at all levels, including in UN reporting on development, emphasizing that the Panel would address the "disconnect" between UN norms, analysis, field operations and country needs in these areas.

¶3. (U) Regarding a schedule, Amin projected that the High Level Panel would convene in New York in late March and begin its work by exchanging views with members of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). The Panel, or at least some of its members, would travel to Madrid o/a April 8 to attend the UN Chief Executive Board meeting. During the ECOSOC session in July, Panel members would probably travel to Geneva (site of the session) to interact with ECOSOC members. Finally, he expected the Panel would meet again in the fall to finalize recommendations to present to the 61st UNGA session in September. (Note: This week, the Panel's Secretariat started to take form with the arrival of a diplomat from the Dutch MFA who will support economic analysis.)

Calls for Coherence

¶4. (U) Several other speakers also stressed the need to better coordinate UN development activities. UN Development Program (UNDP) Assistant Secretary General Bruce Jenks observed that although some 75 percent of the World Summit Outcome Document text focused on development goals, the UN in fact lacked a coherent agenda and follow-up strategies. He challenged delegations and Panel members to undertake fundamental thinking on such questions as, "What do we want from the UN and development?" and, "Why does development need the UN?" While the UN had the potential to serve as an integrator and a pillar of worldwide development activities, Jenks contended that it was currently structured in the antithesis. Programs were fragmented, separate donor and funding streams impeded effectiveness, and UN resident coordinators competed with headquarters for separate agendas and attention.

¶5. (U) In unscripted dinner remarks, Secretary-General Annan's Chief of staff Mark Malloch Brown said the High Level Panel would serve the purpose of adding the best voices to a GA consensus on how the UN could add value to development. Money alone would not be enough to build capacity, he said, although predictable resources would help ensure intergovernmental commitments. In general, the Panel would consider how the UN needed to hone its policy advice, unify its internal governance and develop a strategic vision in order to prioritize its activities. Malloch Brown suggested that a first step was to listen to country needs, including the needs of middle-income countries, in order to cut across the fractured spectrum of funds, programs and specialized agencies. He advocated for "high levels of social investment," including in health and education. Although contributions to funds and programs already totaled some \$12 billion, Malloch Brown said programs were not consolidated and the Panel would need to recommend how funds could be used

better. In his opinion, official development assistance (ODA) remained the best vehicle to deliver results, when it responded to needs defined by recipient countries.

¶6. (U) Malloch Brown further asserted that UN environmental activities lacked a strong international architecture and needed "radical restructuring." He suggested that the UN Environment Program (UNEP) could be folded into "a more tightly organized structure" that integrated meteorological expertise and the activities of other scientific agencies. While such a new agency would not interfere in country operations, he said it would provide a more useful umbrella and coherent environmental vision.

Comments

¶7. (U) Comments from member state representatives further previewed the challenges that the High Level Panel will face. For example, Germany suggested that the Panel must also focus on sectors where the UN had less comparative advantage and where it needed to curtail or even withdraw its activities. Argentina urged special attention to middle-income countries that suffered from pockets of poverty, cautioning against "one size fits all" panaceas. Denmark commented that the most important reform would be to consolidate UN activities within countries, deciding in each case where the emphasis should be. Warning against "drastic reengineering for its own sake," India's Permrep maintained that decentralized entities fulfilled a need and the Panel would need to refrain from "submerging national priorities."

¶8. (SBU) USUN Comment. The diversity of views on UN development coherence, including among delegations and UN officials, portends an array of controversial challenges that High Level Panel members will confront. The proposed meeting of the Panel at the outset with the UN General Assembly is likely to raise the spectre of further conflicting demands (note: the U.S. has suggested that the Panel should instead confer with UNGA toward the end of its study.) However, the U.S. can also constructively use the Panel as a vehicle to

promote coherence by making high-profile recommendations to reduce duplicative functions. Regarding environmental coherence, the UN Secretariat and key Panel members are likely to try to establish a permanent new body to coordinate standards and policy. The U.S. will need to continue to make clear that although we support the improvement of existing institutions and the strengthening of scientific cooperation, we must avoid creating a new supranational structure. The fact that the UN itself has divergent views on the way forward reflects the need for a careful, considerate approach to reform. The report that the Panel will produce in September is likely to generate expectations and set an agenda for years to come.

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